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Question1: Guaranteed operating loans for new farmers and ranchers would help new businesses acquire the capital necessary to start up operations and become successful. Loans should place priority on new businesses implementing the highest level of environmental stewardship. Such a program should support the next generation of farmers and the next generation of farming practices. The latest technology should be deployed to promote long-lasting environmental conservation. Through this program, new farmers should be required to adopt clean-burning propane or other new, environmentally friendly technologies and practices that are in keeping with conservation goals and objectives.

Keeping farm owners and employees safe also represents a challenge to new producers. Through partnerships with industry, education, extension, and the like, training materials can be developed and made available to farm owners, operators, and laborers. The agriculture workplace is too often hazardous. USDA programs that develop and implement safety educational programs could be of great benefit to the new farmer or rancher. Improvements in human health and safety on the farm begin with awareness of the hazards and end with implementation of safe practices that allow laborers to avoid or manage the risk.

A related competitive grant program for new farmers and ranchers that provides 50 percent matching funds to replace older unsafe equipment with newer, safer equipment would be an innovative solution. Noise reductions, indoor air quality improvements, and equipment that eliminates the need to handle chemicals are three possible targets. A new clean-burning, quiet propane engine could reduce hearing losses for workers who are normally exposed to louder diesel engines. This grant concept takes the approach of eliminating the hazard rather than adding additional safety precautions or practices for workers to follow. The same engine on a forklift or tractor can improve indoor air quality if it replaces a high emission diesel engine. A propane steam weed control machine would replace the need to handle and store chemicals.

Question2: Enhancing the 2002 Farm Bill Section 9006: The Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Program, especially the grants program, will improve competitiveness of U.S. agriculture. In order to have the needed impact, the total funding for this program should be increased by at least 50 percent per year. A federal match for grants of 50 percent rather than 25 percent should also be implemented in order to truly support the farmers and rural small businesses that this program targets. Encouraging the utilization of high efficiency appliances and equipment has the potential to make agriculture production more efficient, profitable, and therefore more competitive, while achieving a host of environmental benefits.

Energy efficiency improvements can be achieved by upgrading technology

or utilizing alternative energy sources such as propane. In the midst of rising energy costs, USDA must support improved energy efficiency practices on the farm at a level greater than ever before. USDA should also promote diversity in the energy systems used on the farm as a risk management practice and an alternative to dependence upon single sources of power. The agriculture industry must fully utilize the alternative fuel/energy sources that are currently available. Propane is clean, efficient, and environmentally friendly, plus it is available on 89 percent of farms. Encouraging the increased use of this energy source can reduce a farmer's dependence on other energy sources and therefore reduce the risk of being held hostage to the price sensitivity of an individual resource.

To continue to compete, U.S. agriculture must prevent disease outbreaks and should invest in alternative technology to sanitize buildings and equipment. Propane heat can effectively control a broad spectrum of pathogens. The University of Arkansas has proven that propane heat treatments are effective at controlling a host of harmful pathogens in poultry houses. The Texas Animal Health Commission recommended flame treatments prior to the re-introduction of birds after a 2004 outbreak of avian influenza. This particular treatment is done at a fraction of chemical costs. We must invest in additional alternative sanitation methods that utilize a readily available energy source such as propane for on-farm pathogen and disease control. Heat, steam, and flame technologies can potentially be utilized to safely and cost-effectively sanitize buildings, grounds, and equipment without chemical residue. The competitiveness of U.S. agriculture is predicated on the production of an abundance of wholesome products. Avian influenza, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, and the potential for other disease outbreaks pose a threat to the food supply of the U.S. and our ability to trade our products worldwide.

Also paramount to our ability to compete as an agriculture industry is our ability to properly contain or manage a disease outbreak when it occurs. USDA should partner with other government agencies as well as private industry to develop and enforce policy that mandates the proper disposal of animal mortalities, infected or not, to reduce the risk of spreading or mutation of disease. The safety of human and animal health may be put at risk by the improper disposal of such material. A comprehensive research and development program should be funded to deploy the equipment capable of destroying large quantities of animal mortalities. Encouraging proper on-farm disposal of normal animal mortalities is also important. Developing and deploying the right equipment to ensure proper disposal is an important role for USDA. Propane incinerators burn in excess of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit and could be designed for emergency deployment to safely mitigate this risk by destroying large quantities of animal waste, thereby stopping the spread of disease. Such a system could be designed to provide the throughput necessary to be useful in the event of an emergency when large herds may require on-site disposal.

Question3: In addition to Section 9006 Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency program, the USDA should also commit competitive grant funding to energy efficient alternative fuel research, development, and demonstration projects that benefit the U.S. agriculture sector by providing sound business solutions on the farm while mitigating harmful emissions to the atmosphere. There are several cost-effective, agriculture-specific alternative fuel applications on the brink of commercialization that have been developed by private entrepreneurs through funding support from the Propane Education & Research Council

without the assistance of state or federal grant funding. Even a \$1 million competitive grant program could push several of these endeavors to commercialization and benefit numerous producers with energy efficient and environmentally friendly on-farm solutions. The propane industry has been serving the energy needs of agriculture for many decades and will continue to do so. With a solid infrastructure in place and availability on 89 percent of U.S. farms, propane is a clean burning alternative fuel that is poised to provide energy to control weeds, pests, and power equipment in innovative, environmentally friendly ways.

Question4: Capitalize on existing propane infrastructure and availability by developing and placing clean, propane-fueled power sources on the farm. Propane is specifically listed in the 1990 Clean Air Act and the Energy Policy Acts of 1992 and 2005.

Support the development of alternative fueled propane engines for off-road agriculture use. John Deere recently announced that the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory have continued development of their 8.1L natural gas engine for on-road use. The Farm Bill should capitalize on this work and support the parallel development of clean-burning propane engines for off-road applications on the farm. Many of the same internal engine components could be utilized. Wherever there is a natural gas engine, there should be an equivalent propane engine that is more portable and therefore better suited to provide the power to fulfill the needs of farmers and the needs of rural America in general. According to research funded by the Propane Education & Research Council, propane is available on 89 percent of farms, compared to natural gas, which is utilized on only 29 percent of farms.

Fully fund the fuel cell provision of the energy title in the Farm Bill. Distributed generation (DG) technology has made significant gains in the last few years and does not need a windy or sunny day in which to operate. DG power is steady, kinder to avian life, and continues to pump out amperage whether it's nighttime or overcast weather. Most notably, DG is pollutant-free. To assist DG technology in its long-term goals and ultimate widespread commercialization, funding from government sources remains key, as do tax incentives and favorable regulation. The first adopters of agricultural DG technology should be rewarded through the Farm Bill.

Remove the renewable feedstock requirements for hydrogen fuel cells in the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Improvements grant program. Regardless of its derived source, hydrogen fuel cells yield zero emissions. Prototype propane DG systems currently operate on dairy farms generating electricity and equally important capturing the heat required for both the milking parlors and the pasteurization process.

Question5: USDA should support the development of additional propane delivery infrastructure and especially storage. This will help ensure that adequate propane is always available to generate power, heat buildings, or protect crops in the wake of a national disaster such as a hurricane or prolonged ice and snow. A key component of the current fuel delivery system is the local propane retailer. Often classified as a rural small business, these propane retailers keep farms operating year-round regardless of the weather and could benefit from programs and incentives that would improve delivery or storage infrastructure. Regardless of business classification, propane retailers provide a valuable and important energy to the farm and the enhancement of storage capacity will ensure that agriculture commodities are always protected.

The propane retailer is critical to fulfilling the energy needs of the American farmer.

Question6: Encourage worldwide trade of organic products and the U.S. production of these commodities. With increasing global competition for conventional crop production, U.S. farmers should be encouraged to diversify and find niche markets or value added marketing opportunities for their food and fiber products. One particularly attractive niche with significant potential to spark economic development in rural America is the production of organic commodities. Programs that support this area are needed to meet current and future demand in order to increase farm income and related rural development. Nothing could spark economic development in rural America more quickly than a 100 percent boost in revenue from the sale of certain organic crops. Propane can be essential to the production of organic commodities through heat, flame, or steam pest control. These methods of weed and insect control are already recognized in the National Organic Program guidelines but must be encouraged as "preferred practices" to reduce tillage in order to conserve soil moisture and cut soil erosion. The use of propane heat is also gaining popularity in poultry production, where the intense heat provides broad-spectrum, chemical-free control of pathogens in poultry buildings. This early success provides an unlimited opportunity to explore and implement the use of various forms of propane heat sanitation for all livestock buildings and equipment which could greatly improve productivity for organic producers.